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ABSTRACT

A study examined the leadership and management of reading programs from the viewpoint of principals and reading teachers. A questionnaire designed to describe and evaluate the reading programs in their schools was completed by 153 principals and teachers from public and private schools. Analysis of the results indicates that the nation's reading programs seem to be moving toward holistic programs, which stress comprehension and problem solving, and away from lock-step mastery learning programs that stress subskills and memorization. Some problems identified are a lack of time for teachers to provide individual help and for students to practice their skills, classes that are too large, and lack of flexibility in school programs. Teachers have a positive view of the principal as the administrator of the program, but as a director of learning resources rather than as an administrator who assertively directs teachers' efforts. Principals rated teachers high in terms of classroom environment, individualized instruction, and understanding and supporting the school's philosophy of reading, but indicated that their greatest shortcoming is in their lack of creativity in reading instruction and their reliance on commercial materials. (EL)

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LEADERSHIP IN READING INSTRUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is a skill that brings lifelong benefits to students. Students who are good readers have an advantage in the classroom and on the job, since reading is basic to all learning. Many students who do poorly in reading in the early grades suffer from self-image problems which will plague them throughout their lives. Consequently, effective schools must have successful reading programs because reading is the academic cornerstone.

What constitutes a successful reading program? Authorities in the area of reading agree that successful programs produce students who are not only proficient readers, but students who enjoy reading. And what type of program creates this type of student? Many educators claim that the most important variable is the teacher. They argue that good teachers produce good students who score well on tests--regardless of the quality of the program itself (Bond & Dykstra, 1967). Other researchers claim that the school principal is the key variable (Hillerich, 1983; Shankler, 1982). Edmonds (1978) stated that the school-wide social system--usually created and implemented by the building principal operating as instructional leader--is the key to a successful program. Still others stress the importance of the principal--but in a negative way. Shannon (1981) found that principals alienated teachers by setting goals and requiring procedures which limited the teachers to the use of commercial materials. Brophy (1982), in support of this position, explained that teachers are trained through

teacher education programs to establish instructional objectives for their students and to provide appropriate instruction--but they are denied this opportunity in the public schools and become discouraged in the real world of teaching.

Thus, it appears clear that environmental factors beyond the level of the classroom may infringe upon reading instructional practices and affect the success of reading programs. This research examines how teachers view the building principal and the reading supervisor in an attempt to determine if such alienation is present or widespread. In addition, the principals' perceptions of their teachers and their programs will be examined. The findings represent the "state of the field" of reading in our nation today.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

It was the purpose of this research study to examine reading programs from the viewpoint of principals and reading teachers across the United States and to focus on the leadership and management of those programs. Specifically, the following objectives were enumerated to provide direction for the study:

1. Determine what the current "state of affairs" is with respect to reading programs and leadership.
2. Determine how teachers view the leadership of the building administrator in reading programs.
3. Identify practices which are helpful in producing quality reading programs at both secondary and elementary levels.

4. Develop criteria which can serve to assist in evaluating principal's role in both elementary and secondary programs.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The basic design for this study was descriptive in nature. The survey method of research was utilized as the major component to collect data. Following an extensive review of the literature including educational journals, ERIC documents, Dissertation Abstracts International, and published books and pamphlets, the researchers constructed a questionnaire which gathered data from both teachers and administrators concerning their school, its reading program, and the principals' and teachers' role in those programs. Tentative questionnaires were field tested with teachers in nearby schools in order to evaluate the readability and correct any misunderstandings which might have been created. After incorporating suggestions from those individuals and making other minor changes, the questionnaire was printed in booklet form to be mailed to selected respondents. Included was a cover letter signed by the two researchers. The data collection package folded neatly into one small booklet which contained a postage-paid, return-address envelope. The survey package was very professional in appearance and would be easily recognized by a recipient that the research was being conducted by a Phi Delta Kappa chapter.

THE POPULATION AND SAMPLE

All public and private schools in the United States were included in the population which was to be examined. The sample selected was

done on a random basis selected by computer utilizing a list of schools, their administrations and reading teachers, which was updated during the summer of 1984 by a telephone call from Market Data Retrieval, Inc. to each school. The randomized selection of principals and reading teachers from this inclusive list ensured that a representative group of respondents received a questionnaire.

The surveys were mailed to the representative principals and reading teachers at their school address selected in December 1984. Responses were received during the next two months. Six hundred questionnaires were mailed by first-class mail, one-half to principals and one-half to reading teachers.

RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

One hundred fifty-three respondents returned the questionnaire completed. This was only a 26 percent return rate and less than hoped for by the researchers. The responses were returned over a three-month period beginning in January 1985. Ninety-two percent of the respondents were from public schools and eight percent were from private and parochial schools. This response rate was slightly different from the randomly selected sample which was comprised of 90 percent (541) public schools and 10 percent (59) private/parochial schools.

A SKETCH OF THE RESPONDING SCHOOLS

Schools whose principals and reading teachers responded to the questionnaire represented a cross section of schools, although there were few responses from schools greater than 1500 students. The

greatest number of responses (60.7 percent) were obtained from schools with an average daily attendance between 300 and 800 pupils. (See Table 1 for the frequency and percentage from each category.)

Table 1
SIZE OF SCHOOL

Value Label	Frequency	Relative Frequency Percent	Adjusted Frequency Percent
< 200 ADA	21	13.7	14.0
200-500 ADA	66	43.1	44.0
501-800 ADA	40	26.1	26.7
801-1,000 ADA	6	1.9	4.0
1,001-1,500 ADA	14	9.2	9.3
1,501-2,000 ADA	1	.7	.7
> 2,000 ADA	2	1.3	1.3
No response	3	2.0	
Total	153	100.0	100.0

The schools were from all types of settings; however responses from schools in the central city were the smallest of the four categories. (Table 2 depicts the geographic locations of these schools.)

Table 2
GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF SCHOOL

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
Rural	55	35.9
Urban, Not Metro	35	22.9
Suburban, Part Metro	51	33.3
Central City	12	7.8
Total	153	100.0

Elementary schools made up 44.4 percent of the responding professions locations, 28.8 percent were from middle or intermediate schools, and 16.3 percent were high schools. Unit schools, which represent 10.5 percent of responses, are those which include grade levels from more than one of the above labels. See Table 3 for detailed data on school types.

Table 3
RESPONDENTS PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
IN READING

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
Elementary School	68	44.4
Middle or Intermediate/JHS	44	28.8
High School	25	16.3
Unit School	16	10.5
Total	153	100.0

Knowledge

Sixty-two and one-half percent of respondents rated their knowledge of reading programs either outstanding or very good. Only 9.3 percent rated their knowledge a minimal or inadequate level (See Table 4).

Professional Training

Thirty percent of the respondents had masters, doctorates, or certificates in reading. Approximately 59 percent had three or more hours in reading but no formal degree or certificate. About 11 percent had no formal training in reading (See Table 5).

Table 4
RESPONDENTS KNOWLEDGE OF READING PROGRAMS

Value Label	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Outstanding	23	15.1	15.1
Very good	72	47.4	62.5
Good or adequate	43	28.3	90.8
Additional knowledge would be helpful	13	8.6	99.3
Inadequate	1	.7	100.0

Table 5
RESPONDENTS PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN READING

Value Label	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Doctorate in Reading	2	1.4	1.4
Professional ROG Certificate	22	15.3	16.7
Master's Degree in Reading	20	13.9	30.6
More than 12 hours	28	19.4	50.0
7-12 hours in reading	36	25.0	75.0
3-6 hours in reading	21	14.6	89.6
No formal reading course work	15	10.4	100.0

DESCRIPTION OF READING PROGRAMS

The orientation of the reading programs was focused primarily toward comprehension and meaning (holistic) with one-third of the respondents indicating such. About 26 percent indicated a mastery of skills orientation and 9.7 percent a phonics or word recognition orientation. Thirty percent of the respondents indicated some other orientation, usually a combination of two or three of the program types (see Table 6). Sixty-five (65.3) percent of the respondents indicated their programs had a reading specialist assigned, while 34.7 percent

indicated their programs had no specialist in reading. In 35.9 percent of cases the reading specialist was indicated as the leader of the reading program; in 15.9 percent of cases the principal was indicated as leader. The classroom teacher was the leader in 32.4 percent of cases and the team leader in the school in 3.4 percent of the cases. Twelve (12.4)-percent indicated some other person took charge of reading program (open-ended responses indicated no particular trend in these cases).

Table 6
RESPONDENTS DESCRIPTION OF READING PROGRAMS

Value Label	Frequency	Valid Percent
Word recognition (phonics)	14	9.7
Mastery of skills (skills)	38	26.2
Comprehension and meaning (holistic)	49	33.8
Other*	44	30.3
Total	153	100.0

*Most often a combination of 2 or 3 of above labels

In general the respondents had a positive evaluation of their reading programs. Reading specialists were rated quite high by the respondents in their knowledge of the reading process and instructional techniques as well as their advice and assistance to teachers and principals.

The respondents felt that their programs had a philosophical base which provided direction in selecting materials and activities for the classroom. Materials provided appeared generally to be statisfactory, rating a 3.75 mean on a 5.0 scale. The item receiving the weakest

rating was the design of the program being too structured, although this item still was positive. (See Table 7 for means and medians.)

Table 7
RESPONDENTS EVALUATION OF PROGRAM

Question	Score 5:1--Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree	
	Mean	Median
Program has philosophical base providing direction in choosing materials, activities, etc. for classroom.	3.814	4.00
Program is too structured.	2.290	2.00
Instructional materials are excellent.	3.750	4.00
Reading specialist is knowledgeable in reading process and instructional techniques in reading.	4.598	5.00
Reading specialist provides valuable advice and assistance to principal and teachers in the building.	4.082	4.00

READING PROGRAM EVALUATION

The building principal was most often indicated by respondents to be the formal evaluator of the reading program (44.5 percent). The superintendent or central office was indicated to be the formal evaluator in 19.2 percent of the cases. Another source was indicated 15.8 percent of the cases with classroom teachers and reading specialists being indicated in 11.0 percent and 9.6 percent of cases, respectively.

Table 8 indicates the methods used to evaluate the programs with group scores on tests being most widely used (in 83 percent of cases).

Informal observational reports are utilized in 64.1 percent of cases and parental feedback in 29.4 percent of cases. Opinions of professional staff was the least utilized method.

Table 8
METHODS USED TO EVALUATE READING PROGRAM

	Percent of Respondents
Group Scores on Tests	83.0
Informal Observational Reports	64.1
Opinions of Professional Staff	24.8
Parental Feedback	29.4
Other	17.0

EVALUATION OF CURRENT PROGRAM

Principals and teachers of reading were asked to rate various aspects of the reading program on a one to five scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The results of these responses are depicted in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9
RESPONSES OF PRINCIPALS TO QUESTIONS
(BASED ON 1-5 RESPONSE--STRONGLY
DISAGREE TO STRONGLY AGREE)

Question	Mean	Median
Adequate training of teachers for reading	3.683	4.0
Teachers well grounded in reading theory and instructional implications	3.495	4.0
Teachers rely on commercial materials (as basal reading) too much.	3.210	3.0

Table 9 (continued)

Question	Mean	Median
Teachers need to be more creative in reading instruction.	3.000	3.0
Teachers willing to attend in-service in area of reading	3.723	4.0
Teachers maintain a relaxed/non-threatening learning environment in the classroom.	4.167	4.0
Teachers are sensitive to individual student needs in reading.	4.029	4.0
Teachers support philosophy of reading program that is utilized in school.	4.188	4.0

Table 10
RESPONSES OF TEACHERS TO QUESTIONS
(BASED ON 1-5 RESPONSE--STRONGLY
DISAGREE TO STRONGLY AGREE)

Question	Mean	Median
Principal has good understanding of reading process and its instructional implications.	3.699	4.0
Principal provides strong leadership in reading.	3.710	4.0
Principal establishes good climate for group cohesiveness and harmony among teachers.	3.840	4.0
Principal values reading and demonstrates its importance in curriculum through actions.	3.957	4.0
Principal makes provisions for materials and equipment for reading.	4.151	5.0
Principal assures that reading receives proper share of instructional time.	4.064	4.0

Table 10 (continued)

Question	Mean	Median
Principal encourages participation in reading related in-service activities.	3.862	4.0
Principal participates in reading in-service.	3.304	3.0
Principal is sensitive to true student progress (not just test scores).	4.086	4.0
Principal can effectively evaluate a reading lesson and provide necessary follow-up conference for improving instruction.	3.467	4.0

PROBLEM AREAS AND NEEDED CHANGES

Some of the most revealing findings of the study are in the section of the survey where respondents were asked in an open-ended question to identify and rank three "major problem areas" in reading programs. Lack of time was identified by a two-to-one margin as being the greatest problem. Specifically, respondents stated that teachers did not have enough time to provide individual help to students and that students did not have time during the school day to "practice" their reading skills through the reading of books and other types of pleasure reading. The second major problem was identified as class size. Elementary teachers in particular noted this as a negative factor or problem. Respondents also focused on the lack of flexibility in school curriculums--with the major grievances being the tendency of programs to "lock" students into groups and the programs being too structured. Programs were identified as being too skill oriented, with too little attention being given to thinking and comprehension processes. Respondents also indicated that lack of motivation by the students was a major problem.

Other problems were mentioned frequently by the respondents. These included lack of funding, too much use of commercial materials, poor quality of commercial materials, and testing programs that did not test reading accurately. (See Table 11.)

Table 11
OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES CONCERNING
IDENTIFYING MAJOR RESPONSES

Problem Identified	Rank Order
Lack of time	1
Classes too large	2
Tendency to lock students into group	3
Too great of emphasis on skills	4
Lack of proper reading materials	5
Lack of student motivation	6
Program problems at school, e.g.: only one program; too structured, etc.	7
Lack of emphasis on reading comprehension	8
Lack of funding for reading	9
Student attitude, apathy	10
Lack of good quality instructional materials	10
Too much use of commercial materials	11

Respondents were also asked to indicate what leadership or administrative changes would improve reading programs. Numerous changes were suggested, but several were at the forefront. The number one suggestion was that programs should be directed by a well-trained

reading specialist. Reading skills were seen as being in need of integration throughout all content areas--both in elementary and secondary schools. Administrative support was seen as a critical area. This perhaps relates to the feeling of the respondents that more and better inservice needs to be offered to teachers and principals. Some respondents felt that policies, purposes, and program goals should be clarified. Other factors mentioned included allowing teachers more input into program decisions, providing teacher aides, and requiring administrators to become more knowledgeable about the reading process.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the purposes of this study was to investigate the current "state of affairs" in respect to reading programs and leadership of programs. The results were somewhat surprising. The nation's reading programs seem to be moving toward holistic programs which stress comprehension and problem solving and away from lock-step mastery learning programs that stress subskills and memorization. This is clearly in conflict with the recent "back to the basics" movement, and more recently, legislation in many states mandating direct teaching and testing of basic reading skills. The stage is set for conflict and low morale as teachers are directed by states to teach reading skills that the teachers feel are unnecessary or overemphasized.

The teachers responding to the instrument had a very positive view of the principal as the administrator leading the program; however, the data indicated that building administrators are seen more as a director of learning resources with respect to the reading program rather than as an administrator who takes an assertive role in directing these teachers' efforts.

Overall principals did not rate teachers' action in implementing reading instruction as high as teachers rated principals leadership in reading instruction. The greatest shortcoming, as indicated by principals was in the teachers' creativity in reading instruction and their reliance on commercial materials too much. Principals did, however, rate teachers high in terms of classroom environment, individualizing instruction, and understanding and supporting the school's philosophy of reading.

In evaluating reading programs, administrators currently need to pay attention to the instructional time allocated in the total school program to reading instruction and in support of the program in informal ways, such as leisure reading. The arrangements for individual help in reading instruction should also be subject to review; this includes attention to class size, which might prohibit the individual attention necessary. Flexibility in instruction methodology is critical as all students cannot succeed in reading from the same instructional design. For this reason, among others, proper funding and proper instructional materials should be subject to evaluation.

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